

Equality Statement

At South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust we are fully committed to quality and diversity, both as an employer and as a service provider. We have a policy statement in our Equality Strategy that clearly outlines our commitment to equality for service users, patients and staff:

- You and your family have the right to be treated fairly and be routinely involved in decisions about your treatment and care. You can expect to be treated with dignity and respect. You will not be discriminated against on any grounds including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.
- You have a responsibility to treat other service users, patients and or staff with dignity and respect.

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print.

PALS

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600054, by email: Pals@swft.nhs.uk or by calling in person to the PALS office which is located in the Lakin Road entrance to the hospital.

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South Warwickshire



NHS Foundation Trust

MATERNITY

THE LATENT PHASE OF LABOUR

PATIENT INFORMATION



The latent phase of labour is the time required by the body to complete any preparation for established labour. This stage is different for every woman and every pregnancy, and there is no set time period.

The cervix during this phase will be softening and getting shorter and the baby will be getting his or her chin on to their chest allowing the smallest part of the head to dilate the cervix.

This leaflet should be referred to when you experience irregular contractions.

If contractions are accompanied by:

- Waters breaking
- Any amount of fresh blood
- Reduced movements from baby
- Heavy pressure or urge to push

Contact Labour Ward for advice 01926 495321 ext 4552

What are Braxton Hicks contractions?

Braxton Hicks can occur through the late stage of your pregnancy. They are tightening of the uterine muscles, can last 30-60 seconds, and may be several times an hour, or several times a day.

How can I tell the difference between Braxton Hicks and real labour contractions?

Labour contractions are noticeably longer, more regular in pattern, increased in frequency and are generally more intense than Braxton Hicks contractions.

What is a 'show'

As the cervix begins to flatten and open, the mucus which has been protecting the entrance to your womb comes away. Many women have a 'bloody show' of mucus tinged pink or brown with blood – this is normal. A 'show' means your body is preparing for labour but the birth may be some time away. Many women have a 'show' several days before labour starts.

If there is bright red blood you must phone Labour Ward on 01926 495321 ext 4552

What is happening during the latent phase?

Your contractions may feel uncomfortable but tend not to be regular. They may stop and start, last for 30–40 seconds and continue for several hours. This is normal.

The neck of the womb (the cervix) has been long and closed during your pregnancy. These first contractions, along with Braxton-Hicks contractions that you may have already experienced, help to soften the neck of the womb and prepare your body for active labour.

Occasionally there may be little gaps between these contractions as your body is encouraging the baby into the best position for labour.

As the baby begins to put more pressure on the neck of the womb it will begin to shorten and then open up. Once the cervix is 4cm dilated and the contractions are regular in pattern getting closer together and more intense (about every 5 minutes) lasting for at about a minute, then labour has become active.



Before labour starts, the neck of the womb (cervix) is long, firm and closed



Even before labour begins, the cervix can be drawn up and get thinner



The 'latent' phase of labour is the very first part of your labour – the early part of first stage. During the 'latent' phase the neck of the womb thins and opens up to about 3 – 4 cm

What should I do if I'm not sure if it is the latent phase of labour?

If you think your labour is starting or you are not sure about the latent phase then you may want to seek advice from your community midwife, during the day.

Or you can ring the hospital at any time on any of the following numbers for support and advice from a midwife

01926 495321 ext 4552 OR 4553

Details of your call and the advice that you receive, will be recorded in case you ring back with another query. You can ring back at any time of the day or night whenever you need further advice.

How can I help myself?

There are many ways of helping yourself to cope through these first hours of the latent phase of labour.

Relaxation

It is important to try and remain relaxed. Tension can make the contractions more painful as it affects the amount and efficiency of the oxytocin that is needed to help soften the cervix allowing the baby to pass through easier.

Keep your breathing deep, steady and slow during a contraction. This will prevent you from using extra energy. Once the contraction is wearing off, close your eyes and allow your body to rest before the next one.

Take a warm bath or shower, at regular intervals. You will find the warmth of the water soothing and relaxing.

You may want to have a nap, or sleep.

You may want to call your birthing partner for added support during this time. He/she will give you support and reassurance to help reduce your anxiety. It will be useful if your partner massages your back to reduce backache, helps you relax and supports you in any alternative positions that you may adopt. Your birthing partner can also provide information on the of the latent phase of labour to other family members if required and encourage them to support you rather than raise concerns unnecessarily at this stage.

Remaining upright/active

It is important to remain active without exhausting yourself during this time. Take a walk out with your partner, stopping if you need to during a contraction. Remaining upright will assist gravity and help your baby to descent into the pelvis. Rocking your pelvis and swaying your hips can also assist you. If you have access to a birthing ball, use it regularly as this too can alleviate any discomfort. Kneeling or leaning forward can also help the baby to descend into the pelvis easier than sitting or lying down.

Diet and hydration

Ensure that you maintain your energy levels by eating small, light meals containing carbohydrates such as bread and pasta. The use of high energy drinks (without added caffeine) can also add to your energy requirements and keep you hydrated.

Pain relief

It is safe to take simple painkillers, such as paracetamol. You can take two (500mg) tablets, every 4–6 hours. Do not take more than 8 within a 24 hour period. Some women who have hired a TENS machine put it on during the latent phase, and

find it gives relief. Oral morphine syrup may be prescribed following assessment as a form of pain relief in the latent phase (cervix less than 4cms dilated). The benefits are that you may feel very sleepy and relaxed and may even go to sleep. (This drug is not suitable for women who have asthma, liver or kidney problems or an underactive thyroid condition). It may cause drowsiness, constipation and very occasionally it can make you feel sick. If this happens please tell your midwife as they can treat all of the side effects. It is more effective if taken with paracetamol.

When should I go into hospital?

If you have tried all of the above suggestions and your contractions are now regular in pattern and becoming more intense or painful, you may want to ring the hospital again. The midwife will advise you depending on the information that you give.

If you are invited to go into the hospital then take your bag with you. However, if there are no concerns and labour has not yet established (4cms dilated) you may be asked to return home. The decision will be based on a review of the onset of labour, which may include a vaginal examination. Labour wards are not always the best environment for women who are in the latent phase of labour, as you do not relax as well as you may in your own home.

We hope that this leaflet will have prepared you for labour and help you to be more relaxed and less fearful of the onset of labour.

If you have any concerns or questions, do not hesitate to contact your midwife.